



SAFETY ALERT 04-01

**17th Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
P. O. Box 25517
Juneau, Alaska 99802
907-463-2810 or 800-478-7369 In Alaska
www.uscg.mil/d17/m/CFVS.shtml**

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FISHING VESSEL TAKES ON WATER AND SINKS IN THE BERING SEA, 3 RESCUED, 2 MISSING

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Safety Alert program provides “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties in support of the Coast Guard’s “Ready for Sea” safety program.

Incident: Weather was typical for this time of year in the Bering Sea with 45 knots winds, 30 foot seas and mixed rain and snow. The 91' trawler engaged in a joint venture for cod was enroute to the fishing grounds. Earlier in the day and prior to departing the sheltered waters of Nizzan Bay, the vessel's crew had conducted a routine fish hold cleaning after which they "tanked down" the number 1 hold in an effort to ease the ride due to the weather. Approximately 3 hours after leaving Nizzan Bay, one crewmember awakened for watch and immediately sensed the boat was reacting sluggishly to the seas. Once in the wheelhouse the crewman confirmed the vessel had a port list. The entire crew was alerted and efforts to correct the condition were made. A factory trawler, also part of the joint venture, noticed the trawler was listing heavily to port and immediately notified the Coast Guard. Within minutes the trawler's stern submerged and the vessel sank. The deck boss was last seen wearing an immersion suit on top of the wheelhouse trying to release the survival craft. The master was reportedly in the wheelhouse with his immersion on. The engineer exited the wheelhouse in time to jump into the ocean, but without an immersion suit on. The two other crewmen donned their immersion suits and were able to abandon the vessel prior to it sinking. Within 30 minutes of entering the frigid water, the accompanying factory trawler picked up the three crewmen. The engineer was suffering from hypothermia. The Coast Guard and numerous fishing vessels searched the area extensively for two days for the missing master and deck boss, neither have been located.

Lessons Learned: Although the cause of the casualty remains unknown there are “Ready for Sea” safety factors that are relevant to this incident and several “lessons learned”.

1. Masters must ensure watch standers are familiar with the vessel and its handling characteristics. A trained crew is critical to the safe operation of a vessel and reduces the risk of a casualty. An experienced crewman might have realized the vessel was becoming "sloppy" and "sluggish", indications the vessel's stability may have been compromised. He could then have alerted the crew and possibly taken action to prevent the sinking.
2. Crew training in emergency situations is critical. Conduct drills as if they are an actual emergency and include all crewmembers. Don and work in immersion suits during drills as immersion suits are bulky and the heavy neoprene can make simple tasks difficult. Drills should include practicing manual deployment of the liferaft canister, which should be accomplished in less than 30 seconds.
3. Secure all watertight hatches when not being used for entry or exit. It is possible that the trawler's lazarette hatch cover was not properly secured. In heavy seas the lazarette may quickly have filled with water causing the vessel's "sloppy" and "sluggish" response and resulting loss of stability.
4. Install visual and audible high water alarm indicators in the alarm panel in the wheelhouse. Test the high water alarms every month. There was an alarm in the trawler's lazarette but the alarm panel in the wheelhouse was only equipped with visual alarm indicators. Had there been an audible alarm it is possible that other crewmembers would have been alerted. Some vessels also employ short circuit TV systems to visually monitor spaces from the wheelhouse.